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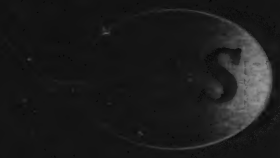
ABSTRACT

The Community for Learning program (CFL), also known as the Learning City Program, a school-based intervention program, is described. A major premise of this program is that the national standards of educational outcomes can and must be upheld for all students, including those at risk. At the core of the program's design is over 20 years of research and the school-based implementation experience of two widely implemented programs, the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (M. Wang, 1992) and the School Development Program (J. Comer, 1985). The CFL design includes three components: (1) school development that assists schools in establishing a planning and management team and a mental health team; (2) the family-community for learning, designed to use the resources and energies of families and the community to support student learning; and (3) the Adaptive Learning Environments mode, which is an instructional delivery system designed to meet the diverse needs of individual students in regular classroom settings that include special education, Title I, and bilingual students. Implementation of the CFL in a middle school in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) is described. This Title I school in a disadvantaged neighborhood is divided into three houses, one of which implemented CFL in the 1992-93 school year. Special education and English-as-a-second-language students were integrated into regular classes. Teachers worked in teaching teams to find solutions to problems of low achievement, violence, and parental despair, and several innovative approaches to parent participation were implemented. Overall mathematics and reading achievement scores of students in this "house" were somewhat higher, although not to statistical significance. When long-term effects of participation in CFL were studied, there was a significant increase in high school completion for CFL students. CFL offers promise for improving the academic achievement and school completion of disadvantaged students. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)



Laboratory for Student Success

ED 419 863

Achieving Student Success in Inner-City Schools Is Possible, Provided...

by
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School District of Philadelphia

and

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Laboratory for Student Success
The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at
Temple University Center for Research in
Human Development and Education

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The research report herein was supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education through a contract to the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) established at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE), and in part by CRHDE. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the supporting agencies, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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Introduction

Schools today, particularly those in this nation's urban communities, are faced with the challenge of serving an increasingly diverse student population that is academically at risk. Problems of great severity exist for many children and families; central among them are inadequate learning and low self-esteem, compounded by stressful life experiences, poor health care, and highly fragmented patterns of services. Solutions to these problems require insights and expertise drawn from many disciplines and professions, and collaboration between family, school, and community. The best information and tools for program implementation and evaluation and, more importantly, a broad-based commitment to achieve schooling success and competence of children and youth are needed to significantly improve this nation's capacity for education (Wang, 1996).

Recent advances in research and practice on what makes learning more productive, especially for students with special needs, provide clear directions on how to substantially improve conventional practice (Brandt, 1994; Committee for Economic Development, 1994; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1992; Wang & Reynolds, 1994). Many research-based, innovative programs/practices can be implemented in scaled-up efforts to improve the capacity of local schools to respond more effectively to the diverse learning needs of students. However, current practice in schools falls far short of the state of the art. One reason is the lack of a systematic knowledge base on how to restructure the current system of service delivery to incorporate demonstrably effective practices to achieve a high standard of schooling outcomes for every student, including those with special needs and those who are otherwise considered to be academically at risk. It is in this context, of bringing what is known to work to bear in efforts to achieve learning success and competence of children and youth in inner-city schools, that the Community for Learning program (also known as the Learning City Program), a school-based intervention program described in this article, was initiated.

The Community for Learning (CFL) program is based on a program of research conducted at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE) on what works to increase the capacity for education in this nation's schools (Wang, 1992; Wang, 1996), particularly those with high concentrations of a diversity of students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. It is designed as a broad-based, school-family-community linked, coordinated approach to improving student learning. A major premise of CFL is that the national standards of educational outcomes can and must be upheld for *all* students, including those "at the margins;" that is, students who, for whatever reason, are struggling in their academic programs or in their social behavior, or who are learning and adjusting to school life especially well but are receiving little help, and who require instruction that is adapted to their individual needs. The challenge is to find ways to harness all of the resources, expertise, and energies in linking schools with other learning environments, including homes, churches, postsecondary education institutions, libraries, and private- and public-sector workplaces to support the learning of all students.

The Design of the Community for Learning Program

The Community for Learning program was designed as a delivery framework for providing more effective school responses to student diversity to ensure the schooling success of children and youth, focusing on ways to draw on the research base, the practical know-how, and a full spectrum of school, family, and community resources. At the core of the program's design is over 20 years of research and the school-based implementation experience of two widely implemented programs, the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM) (Wang, 1992), the School Development Program (Comer, 1985), as well as CRHDE's program of research on fostering educational resilience through building connections between school, family, and community (Rigsby, Wang, & Reynolds, 1995; Wang & Gordon, 1994). A centerpiece of CFL is a framework for a collaborative process of uniting people and resources in initiating schoolwide restructuring efforts to ensure the schooling success of

every student. This process strengthens the school's capacity to mobilize and redeploy community and school resources to support the implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and inclusive approach to effectively respond to students' diverse instructional and related service needs.

Specifically, the design of CFL includes three major components: (a) school development, which assists schools in establishing a planning and management team and a mental health team; (b) the family-community for learning, that is designed to utilize the resources and energies of families and the community to support student learning; and (c) the Adaptive Learning Environments Model, an instructional delivery system designed with an inclusive approach for meeting the diverse needs of individual students in regular classroom settings, including special education, Title I, and bilingual students. A key design feature of the adaptive instruction component is a coordinated approach to service delivery that involves a restructuring of public resources and staff roles, and a shared responsibility and collaborative team approach that includes regular and special education teachers and other "specialist" professionals such as school psychologists, speech pathologists, and others. Table 1 provides a summary list of key design features of CFL.

The implementation of the CFL components is supported by a delivery system that provides organizational and professional development support needs for achieving a high degree of implementation at the school and classroom levels (Wang, 1992). A basic operating principle of CFL is that there is a substantial knowledge base on variables that influence learning and on what works in fostering significant improvements in student achievement. However, no single component or practice can account for these improvements. What seems crucial is the way in which successful practices are combined in an integrated system of delivery that considers the needs of the students and the site-specific strengths and constraints at the staff, resource support, policy, and administrative levels. Poorly implemented versions of demonstrably successful practices are unlikely to achieve the same success. Furthermore, some practices that work well in some settings and with some students

may not have the same effect as others. Nonetheless, the research base on what works provides a promising basis for formulating improvement programs that are both site-specific and strategic.

Program Implementation at Sunrise Middle School

During the initial implementation period, documentation of program implementation and outcomes focused on the following questions: (a) Is it feasible to achieve program implementation within the pilot year? and (b) To what extent can program outcomes be achieved after an initial program implementation year? In general, we found that it is feasible to implement the kinds of structural changes that are required in school sites that vary in demographic characteristics and resources, despite complex implementation problems and policy barriers. The data indicate that when CFL is implemented to a moderate or high degree, significant positive patterns of intended program outcomes were observable at the implementation sites, even during the initial years. While some site variations were observed in the degree of program implementation and in the site-specific programmatic emphases, the findings were quite consistent across all sites, and are reflective of the research base on effective practices and student learning outcomes.

During the initial implementation period, data on a variety of program outcomes were collected, including: degree of program implementation, patterns of family and community participation, resource redeployment and utilization, and the wide range of program impact on school operations, staff attitudes, and student learning. Discussion of program impact will focus on selected student learning outcomes.

CFL implementation seeks to impact three major areas of student outcomes: (a) improved student achievement, particularly for those at the margins of the achievement distribution; (b) patterns of active learning and teaching processes that are consistent with the research base on effective classroom practices and student behaviors; and (c) positive student perceptions about school learning environments. Two types of data were collected: students' perceptions about their

classroom and school learning environments, using a survey instrument designed for this purpose (National Center on Education in the Inner Cities, 1991); and student achievement in reading and math, based on district-wide standardized test results.

Sunrise Middle School is a Title I schoolwide project school situated in an inner-city area of Philadelphia, punctuated with abandoned factories and rundown houses. Physically, the school's graffitied structure is seemingly isolated from the modern world. The school is surrounded by drug gang territory; students literally cross "war zones" to get to their school. With 60% of the children in the community born to unwed mothers and 93% growing up in low-income families, Sunrise is faced with social ills of many types and in many languages. Overall, the school has been characterized as the most turbulent middle school in the school district (Mezzacappa, 1994). Seventy-eight percent of the 970 students are Latino. The student turnover rate is 35%. Of the teaching staff, 38% are in their first three years in the School District of Philadelphia.

Structurally, Sunrise is organized into three houses. Students are placed randomly in one of the three vertically organized house structures, located on different floors of the school building. Within each house, teaching teams have common weekly preparatory time to facilitate cross-curricular planning and problem solving. Discussion of program impact will focus on implementation of CFL at Sunrise during the initial three implementation years.

Initial implementation of CFL by the Red House Staff began during the 1992-93 school year. In the Red House, special education students and intermediate and advanced ESOL students are integrated in regular classes on a full-time basis. Special education and bilingual education students are in segregated, self-contained classes in the other houses. Of the total student population at Sunrise for the 1992-93 academic year, 21% are in special education and 17% in

LEP. In 1992-93, the Red House included 23% special education and 34% LEP students enrolled at Sunrise.

Staff at the Red House spent much of their planning time discussing implementation issues and making next-step decisions based on student program data. Teachers working in teaching teams sought individual as well as group solutions to the problems of low achievement, violence, and parental despair. The school staff regularly utilized scheduled meeting time to address implementation issues, plan house-wide projects, and support after-school workshops. An on-site graduate-level course on instructional teaming strategies offered by CEIC staff provided an added opportunity for school staff to design collaborative structures and receive feedback on their implementation.

Several innovative projects were also initiated to increase parent involvement, including biweekly parent workshops on a variety of topics of concern to parents and the community; extension services by neighborhood agencies that provide family counseling, adult education, and job training; and social outings that include both parents and children, ranging from hay rides to museum trips to sporting events. In addition, several strategies were developed in collaboration with the Philadelphia Free Library to encourage children and families to read. For example, acquiring a library card became easier, a book return system was established in the school, and the school became involved in the planning and support of local library activities and events.

Students' Perceptions of Their Classroom/School Environment

Because of the unique demographics of Sunrise, no comparison middle school could be identified. However, since not all of the houses at Sunrise participated in program implementation during the two initial CFL implementation years, program versus nonprogram comparisons were carried out to determine program impact. Figure 1 presents the results.

As shown in Figure 1, a Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) revealed significant differences in the students' overall perceptions of their classroom/school learning environments. Students in the Red House showed more positive perceptions on 9 of the 11 subscales[1]. Students felt that their instructional/learning environments were more multicultural, social, active, nontraditional, and interdisciplinary. According to the students, classroom environments offered more affiliation, guidance, teacher support, and participation; and they indicated a higher rate of constructive feedback, higher student aspirations, more positive self-concepts, and a clearer sense constructive feedback, higher student aspirations, more positive self-concepts, and a clearer sense of the rules governing class and school learning environments. In addition, a pattern of increased attendance was observed during both program implementation years. The student attendance rate was 55% in 1992-93 and 71% in 1994-95. By contrast the attendance rate for the Red House was 78% in 1992-93 and 84% in 1994-95.

Student Achievement

An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was performed to determine if 1995 achievement scores differed between students in the Red House and those in the rest of the school after initial score differences were taken into account. Overall, the mean reading and math achievement scores of the students in the Red House were found to be somewhat higher (although not statistically significant) than the mean scores of the rest of the school. It is of interest to note the program's positive impact on students in the bottom and top 20% of the achievement distribution. For both program implementation years, as shown in Table 2, less than 20% of students in the Red House

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[1] A mean score close to the value of four for each scale (or a mean score close to the value of five on the achievement motivation scale (which is made up of five items), indicates that students perceive a particular variable category as prevalent. That is, their ratings indicate they are in strong agreement with the items (descriptors) included in that particular variable category. A mean score close to zero indicates that students perceive a particular variable category as not prevalent; that is, their ratings indicate they disagree with the descriptor included in that particular variable category.

scored in the bottom 20% of the achievement distribution of Sunrise in reading and math. This compares favorably with data for students in the remainder of the school, even though special education and bilingual education students were included in regular classes in the Red House (their scores were included in the analysis) and no special education or bilingual students were included in regular classes elsewhere in the school. Furthermore, in the Red House a greater proportion of students than expected scored at the top 20% of the achievement distribution of Sunrise in both reading and math, compared with students not in the Red House.

Follow-up: 1992 Graduates of Sunrise Middle School

A follow-up study was conducted to assess the long-term effects of CFL on student outcomes, focusing in particular on addressing the question of whether the significant differences in student outcomes between Red House and non-Red House students would be maintained during high school years. The Community for Learning program was not implemented at the high schools or the vocational schools that serve the Sunrise graduates.

The student sample for the follow-up study included all of the students of the graduating class of 1992 from Sunrise who enrolled in a Philadelphia high school or vocational school upon graduation. The 1992 classes included 55 regular students, with 7 special education students and 4 bilingual students integrated in those classes on a full time basis. For comparison purposes the follow-up study also included the 1992 graduates who were enrolled in non-Red House regular and self-contained special education classes at Sunrise. The majority of the Sunrise students attended the community comprehensive school for which Sunrise is a feeder school.

Student Outcomes

Several indicators of student outcomes were used in our comparative analyses, including grade level placement and enrollment rate. The findings are highlighted in the discussion below.

Enrollment Status. An expected outcome of the implementation of CFL is a significant increase in the rate of high school completion among students who participated in the program. Since high school drop out rate is a particularly severe problem among students in inner-city high schools, the enrollment status of program graduates was considered to be one of the critical indicators of program impact. It was our hypothesis that the positive learning experience students have during their middle school years would make a difference in their motivation and ability to complete their high school education and beyond.

The follow-up data was quite impressive. Out of the Red House regular education students who attended one of the comprehensive high schools or enrolled in a vocational program in the School District of Philadelphia, 81% remained enrolled in high school as of March, 1995 (three years after graduating from Sunrise). All of the special education students (100%) who were integrated into regular education classes in the Red House at Sunrise were still attending one of the comprehensive high schools or enrolled in a vocational program in the School District of Philadelphia as of March, 1995.

Of the non-Red House Sunrise regular education students who enrolled in one of the Philadelphia high schools or vocational schools after they graduated from Sunrise, only 40% remained enrolled in school as of March, 1995. Fifty-two percent of the non-Red House special education students were still enrolled as of March, 1995. These statistics are in marked contrast to those of the Red House students.

Grade-level Placement. One indicator of student achievement is students' grade-level placement. Table 3 provides a summary of the grade level placement data for the sample of students in the follow-up study. As shown in Table 3, for students from Sunrise who attended the Red House classes, 50% of the regular education students were able to maintain on grade level placement (placement at 11th or 12th grade during the 1994-95 academic year), and 43% of the

special education students who were integrated in the Red House classes were able to maintain their grade level placement in regular classes in high school. In contrast, only 26% of the regular education students from the non-Red House classes at Sunrise, and 17% of non-Red House special education students had on grade level placement. The dropout rate as of March, 1995 for the Red House regular education students was 19% and 0% for special education students. On the other hand, the drop out rate for the non-Red House regular students was 60% and the dropout rate for non-Red House special education students was 48%.

Discussion

The advances in theory and research on individual differences in learning and effective schooling practice have had very little impact on how schools respond to student diversity. Many students have difficulty achieving learning success and need better help than they are now receiving, in spite of the multitude of "special" and/or "compensatory or remedial" programs that had been instituted to improve educational achievement for students requiring "greater-than-usual" educational and related services support. If all students are to successfully complete a basic education through equal access to a common curriculum, the way in which schools respond to the diversity of student needs must undergo major conceptual and structural changes. Improvement efforts must take into consideration the learning context and require collaboration and coordination among professionals on a scale never previously attempted. Program implementation must be a shared responsibility of all stakeholder groups at the grassroots level to address the multiple, co-occurring "risks" prevalent in the lives and learning of many children, particular those in the most inner of the inner cities, who are placed further at risk because of the inadequate education they receive. The work of the Community for Learning Program represents one attempt to find ways to reduce the co-occurring risks that surround many inner-city children and families. Our findings suggest the feasibility and potential for significant improvements.

Linking school efforts to achieve significant improvements in student learning—efforts that focus on the well-being and educational success of children and youth who live in the most adverse life circumstances—is central to the Community for Learning's concept and implementation. Although quite impressive advances have been achieved in a relatively short period by the case study school, much attention must be paid during the next phase of implementation to charting a course of action that will bring to scale what works in the unique situations of this school. The structural and attitudinal changes required for instituting changes that transcend single professional field and agency auspices cannot occur without rooted connections with families and the community.

A variety of innovative programs have emerged across the country emphasizing coherent and seamless child and family services that seek to improve the education and life circumstances of children and youth placed at risk. These programs range from local, grassroots community efforts to state- and federal-level initiatives that seek to transform fragmented, inefficient systems of service delivery into a network of coordinated partnerships that cross programmatic and agency lines. However, despite unprecedented national attention and a myriad of programmatic initiatives at all levels, solid information is significantly lacking on ways to bring what is known to work to bear in addressing the problem of inadequate learning among children and youth. This lack only compounds the difficulties for children and families living in circumstances that place them at risk who are faced with a litany of modern morbidities.

Few educational reforms have generated the same level of ground-swelling support as the comprehensive approach to coordinated educational and related services for children as a key school improvement agenda. The ultimate goal, one that the Community for Learning program espouses, is to foster development and educational resilience and to promote the learning success of children and youth requiring greater-than-usual educational and related service supports. Of

course, schools must remain the primary focus in efforts to find ways to improve this nation's capacity for education; for surely other efforts will come to naught if we fail to offer powerful forms of education in our schools. However, educational reforms of the 1990s that aim to address the deepening problems faced by children and families in a variety of at-risk circumstances, such as those who live in this nation's inner cities, must provide a broad-based coherent approach including family, school, and other community resources.

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The Laboratory for Student Success

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of ten regional educational laboratories in the nation funded by the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practice in the service of children and youth.

The mission of the Laboratory for Student Success is to strengthen the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform through collaborative programs of applied research and development and services to the field. In particular, the LSS facilitates the transformation of research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be readily integrated into the educational reform process both regionally and nationally. To ensure a high degree of effectiveness, the work of the LSS is continuously refined based on feedback from the field on what is working and what is needed in improving educational practice.

The ultimate goal of the LSS is the formation of a connected system of schools, parents, community agencies, professional organizations, and institutions of higher education that serves the needs of all students and is linked with a high-tech national system for information exchange. In particular, the aim is to bring researchers and research-based knowledge into synergistic coordination with other efforts for educational improvement led by field-based professionals.

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